

*Calls for Governor to Ease Burden on Most Vulnerable Populations*

January 27, 2010

**Media, PA** – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) wrote to Governor Ed Rendell, calling on the Governor to avoid cuts to state supplemental payments (SSP) to disabled and elderly and low income individuals. Specifically, Congressman Sestak called for the exemption from the change, which amounts to a 20% reduction in state assistance to disabled individuals, for blind and disabled children and disabled individuals relying solely on federal Supplement Security Income (SSI) payments.

“While I am not indifferent to the plight of the Commonwealth during this economic downturn, it dismays me that the neediest of our Commonwealth’s citizens would be selected to bear disproportionately the brunt of the state’s budgetary crisis,” wrote Congressman Sestak.

The cuts affect more than 340,000 elderly or disabled Pennsylvanians who receive state supplemental payments, of which as many 67,000 are children. The current SSP in Pennsylvania provides for a monthly payment of \$27.40 to individuals and \$43.70 to couples who receive SSI benefits. The cuts included in the state budget call for a reduction in monthly benefits of \$5.30 for individuals and \$10.40 cents for couples, as much as \$125 dollars for some families.

“Given the economic climate and the great need faced by those who receive this assistance, even the somewhat modest cuts included in the States budget can have a significant impact,” said Congressman Sestak. “We must take any possible step to avoid balancing the budget on the backs of the disabled children.”

Supplemental Security Income, which has been in effect since 1974, is a federal program that assures a minimum income for people age 65 or over, or who are blind or disabled, who do not have sufficient income and resources to maintain a standard of living at the established Federal minimum income level. States can also provide additional assistance, known as the state supplemental payments (SSP) beyond the amount of federal assistance.

Full text of the letter below:

January 26, 2010

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell

Office of the Governor

225 Main Capitol Building

Harrisburg, PA 17120-0062

Dear Governor Rendell,

It is with some concern that I learned of the Commonwealth's measures that reduce the State Supplemental Payment (SSP) for the large majority of blind, disabled or elderly recipients of the Supplemental Security Income program, effective February 1. I include the Operations Memorandum 10-01-03 issued by the Department of Public Welfare on January 14, 2010. I note that among those affected are blind and disabled children. While I am not indifferent to the plight of the Commonwealth during this economic downturn, it dismays me that the neediest of our Commonwealth's citizens would be selected to bear disproportionately the brunt of the state's budgetary crisis.

SSI has been in effect since 1974, after enactment and implementation, through Title XVI of the Social Security Act, of the federal takeover of state programs of aid to the elderly, the blind and the disabled. The basic purpose underlying the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program is to assure a minimum income for people age 65 or over, or who are blind or disabled, who do not have sufficient income and resources to maintain a standard of living at the established Federal minimum income level. 20 CFR 416.110. The regulation continues to state that:

...each State may choose to provide more than the Federal supplemental security income ... to whatever extent it finds appropriate in view of the needs and resources of its citizens... 20 CFR 416.110 (f)

The SSP has provided up to February 1 \$27.40 to individuals and \$43.70 to couples who receive SSI benefits. Both needs and resources are to be addressed, since the state has deemed the SSP to be appropriate.

Addressing those needs, the Pennsylvania Legislature acted out of practicality, legislating the SSP from recognition that these recipients' living costs and debts to vendors necessitated this life-supporting supplementation. The legislature had determined that supplement was appropriate in view of the needs of its citizens. Consequently, the State Supplemental Payment has protected from dire need the blind, the disabled workers and the retirees whose wages were insufficient to qualify for Social Security benefits without supplementation. It has also protected the blind or disabled children. Given today's extraordinary economic climate I question if consideration could be given to continuing the former SSP, at least for blind or disabled children, and for blind, disabled or elderly individuals and couples, whose SSI is the sole income, not adjusted by earnings or other pension.

Thank you kindly for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your reply.

Warmest regards,

Joe Sestak

Member of Congress

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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